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**MAINTAINING PEACE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA AND THE  
SPRATLY ISLANDS: ARE THERE ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVES  
TO THE U.S. NAVAL FORCES FORWARD DEPLOYED  
IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION?**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The potential for conflict in the South China Sea over different nations territorial claims to the Spratly Islands continues to threaten the regions current peace and stability. This paper will address the threats to U.S. strategic interests in the region, develop alternative approaches to securing those interests and recommend an appropriate national policy and planning guidance.



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## **MAINTAINING PEACE IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA AND THE SPRATLY ISLANDS: ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO THE U. S. NAVAL FORCES FORWARD DEPLOYED IN THE ASIA/PACIFIC REGION?**

United States Navy forces forward deployed in the Asia/Pacific region support a U.S. National Security Policy and Military Strategy of engagement with countries in that region. This paper analyzes alternatives to the current Navy strategy of forward presence in helping to maintain peace and stability in the South China Sea.

### **GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW**

We live in a world today shaped less by the physical boundaries and borders between nations than ever before. In this age of globalization the rapid increases in technology, information exchange, and free trade throughout the world have brought all but a few nations into a shared global environment where one must participate in order to prosper. In "A National Security Strategy For A Global Age"<sup>1</sup> then president Clinton outlined the U.S. strategy of "engagement" to shape the international environment in the best interests of the United States. This strategy uses U.S. diplomatic, economic and military strengths as "means" to achieve the desired "ends." Along with the ability to shape the international environment is the necessity to be properly prepared to respond to crises, threats and conflicts and to always be looking forward and preparing for an uncertain future.<sup>2</sup>

Since the National Security Strategy was published in December 2000 we have a new administration and have lived through a traumatic terrorist attack on U.S. soil. A review of our overall national security strategy is needed and underway in view of those events. When the ongoing review is complete I believe the need for active engagement with countries throughout the world and the ability to shape the world environment to best promote U.S. national interests will exist as much if not more than before. We currently see the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism as an example of engagement which serves not only U.S. national interests but other nations as well who also see the need to eliminate worldwide terrorism and those governments that sponsor it.

It is in the United State's national interests to maintain peace and stability throughout the world. Worldwide peace and stability allow for the growth of human rights and democracy, continued world economic development and the freedom of trade. Instability and tensions caused by disputes amongst sovereign nations or international terrorism have the potential to effect adversely not only those nations' economies but others in the region and throughout the world.

## **INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER**

The U.S. has significant means through its national instruments of power to attempt to resolve tensions and conflicts between nations that have the potential to escalate and become harmful to U.S. national interests. Active diplomacy and participation in alliances such as the U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty, ROK-U.S. Alliance, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allow the U. S. to shape the environment and position itself for deterring and responding to crises and threats.

Economic and monetary policies (such as granting most favored nation trading status) that encourage trade and growth with other countries or policies that restrict or prohibit free trade are powerful means that the U.S. can use to further influence and shape the worldwide environment in its best interests.

Military power is another means available to the U.S. to shape the environment. While the military's ultimate purpose is to fight and win our nations wars it is also a very effective force to shape the international environment and deter potential conflict and aggression prior to actual commencement of armed conflict.

## **MILITARY ENGAGEMENT**

The 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review<sup>3</sup> based its military strategy around the premise of shape, respond and prepare. This strategy correlated with the national security strategy of engagement.

The recently released 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review<sup>4</sup> completed after the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States has 4 key goals concerning development, deployment and use of U.S. forces:

- "Assuring Allies and friends of the United States steadiness of purpose and its capacity to fulfill its security commitments;
- Dissuading adversaries from undertaking programs or operations that could threaten U.S. interests or those of our allies and friends;
- Deterring aggression and coercion by deploying forward the capacity to swiftly defeat attacks and impose severe penalties for aggression on an adversary's military capability and supporting infrastructure; and
- Decisively defeating any adversary if deterrence fails."<sup>5</sup>

These defense policy goals can be broken down to: assure, dissuade, deter and defeat.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review emphasizes strengthening the U.S. forward deterrent posture. Specifically, Department of Defense planning will maintain

regionally tailored forces forward stationed and deployed in Northeast Asia, East Asia littorals, Europe and the Middle East/Southwest Asia region. These tailored forward-stationed forces confirm the long standing U.S. policy of well being and security for allies and friends, and precluding hostile domination of these critical areas.<sup>7</sup>

While the buzzwords used to define the 1997 and 2001 Quadrennial Defense Reviews are different the fundamental ability to use the military as an element of national power remains. Used separately or in conjunction with other elements of national power the military has a unique capability to assure our allies and friends and demonstrates a physical capability to dissuade potential non-friendly or aggressor nations from taking actions not in the U.S. or friendly nations national interests.

Participating in military exercises and joint training with other nations' militaries, military to military contacts and the concept of forward presence of U.S. forces all are types of engagement by military forces that show U.S. resolve and commitment and are a clear indication of our ongoing ability to be on scene worldwide to influence events. If the use of military power along with the coordinated use of other U.S. instruments of national power do not defuse tension or crisis and it comes to armed conflict, the military has the ability to apply devastating and overwhelming combat power to resolve it in a military manner favorable to U.S. interests as determined by the President.

## **SOUTH CHINA SEA AND THE SPRATLY ISLANDS**

One area in which forward presence and active engagement by U.S. military forces plays a key role in assuring our allies and maintaining peace and stability is the Asia/Pacific region. In the South China Sea a small group of rocks, reefs, shoals, sandbanks and islands (some being submerged during high-tide) stretching more than 600 nautical miles in length but containing less than 3 square miles in total land area are called the Spratly Islands<sup>8</sup> (FIGURE 1).

The Spratly's occupy a position between Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. Due to the potential for significant undeveloped oil and natural gas resources in and around the Spratlys, their strategic location near major shipping lanes and the various nations in the region that all have territorial claims on part or all of them, they are considered a potential flashpoint for tension and conflict in the Asia/Pacific region. ADM Dennis C. Blair, USN, Commander in Chief United States Pacific Command (CINCPAC) summed up the interrelationship between economic and security affairs in Asia by stating, "If recent events in Asia have taught us anything, it has brought home the fact that economics and security affairs are part of a seamless web."<sup>9</sup>

While most of the Spratly Island chain is nothing but reefs, rocks and outcropping with little inhabitable land, the islands are important for strategic and political reasons. The South China Sea is a critical Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) for nations in the Asia/Pacific region and for the remainder of the world that conducts sea based trade with nations in the region. Over

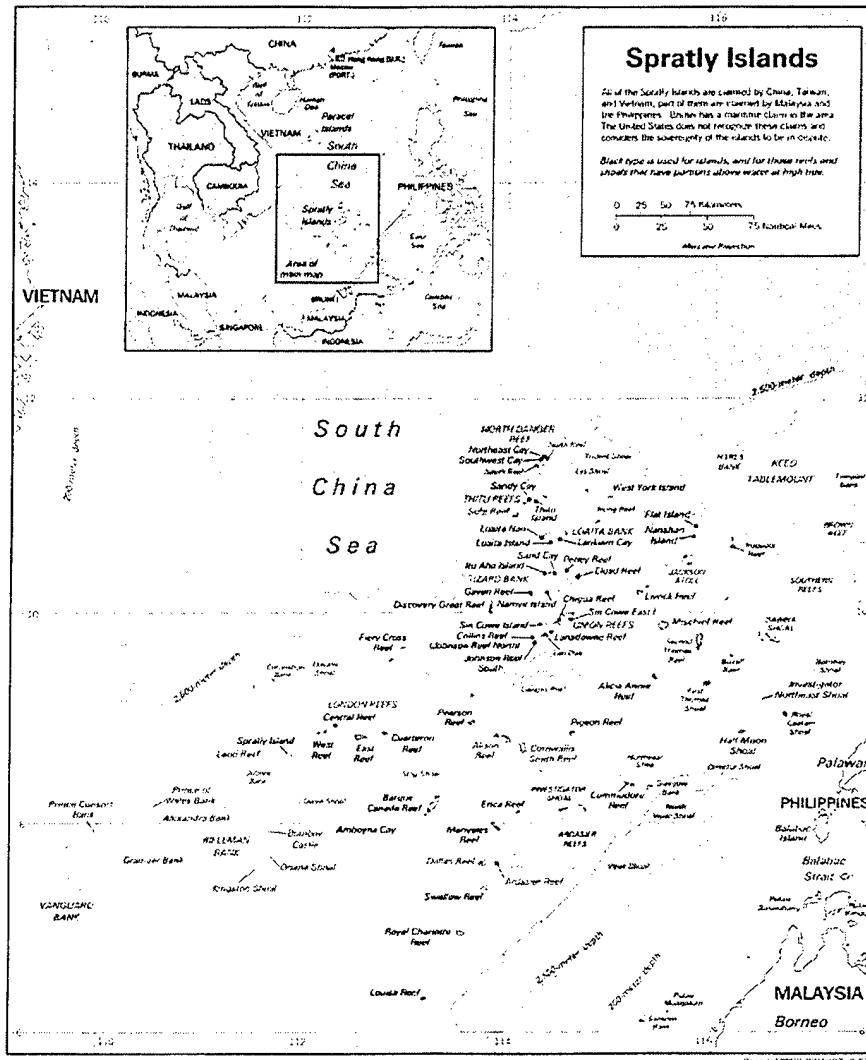


FIGURE 1 SPRATLY ISLAND MAP

The potential for significant oil and natural gas resources on the Islands and in their surrounding waters has lead to continued claims and counterclaims over territorial sovereignty. China (which claims them in their entirety), Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan, the Philippines and Vietnam all have claims to some or all of the Islands based on different principles. A detailed listing of the territorial claims of the nations previously mentioned is shown in table 1.

half of the world's shipping passes through the South East Asia SLOCs with much of it being vital to sustaining the growing energy needs and economies of nations in the region. Any attempt to interfere with the safe and unhindered passage of shipping through these waters would have significant effects felt throughout not only the Asia/Pacific region but throughout the world as well. This is an area where it is in the interests of the U.S. to ensure stability on the seas.<sup>10</sup>

Country	Claim
Brunei	<p>Does not occupy any of the islands, but claims part of the South China Seas nearest to it as part of its continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The boundary lines are drawn perpendicularly from 2 outermost points on the Brunei coastline. In 1984, Brunei declared an EEZ that includes Louisa Reef.</p>
China	<p>Refers to the Spratly Islands as the Nansha islands, and claims all of the islands and most of the South China Sea for historical reasons. These claims are not marked by coordinates or otherwise clearly defined. China also claims the Paracel Islands (referred to as the Xisha Islands), and includes them as part of its Hainan Island province.</p> <p>Chinese claims are based on a number of historical events, including the naval expeditions to the Spratly Islands by the Han Dynasty in 110 AD and the Ming Dynasty from 1403-1433 AD. Chinese fishermen and merchants have worked the region over time, and China is using archaeological evidence to bolster its claims of sovereignty.</p> <p>In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, China asserted claims to the Spratly and Paracel islands. During World War II, the islands were claimed by the Japanese. In 1947, China produced a map with 9 undefined dotted lines, and claimed all of the islands within those lines. A 1992 Chinese law restated its claims in the region.</p> <p>China has occupied 8 of those islands to enforce its claims. In 1974, China seized the Paracel Islands from Vietnam.</p>
Indonesia	<p>Not a claimant to any of the Spratly Islands. However, Chinese and Taiwanese claims in the South China Sea may extend into Indonesia's EEZ and continental shelf, including Indonesia's Natuna gas field.</p>
Malaysia	<p>Its Spratly claims are based upon the continental shelf principle, and have clearly defined coordinates. Malaysia has occupied 3 islands that it considers to be within its continental shelf. Malaysia has tried to build up one atoll by bringing soil from the mainland and has built a hotel.</p>
Philippines	<p>Its Spratly claims have clearly defined coordinates, based both upon the proximity principle as well as on the explorations of a Philippine explorer in 1956. In 1971, the Philippines officially claimed 8 islands that it refers to as the Kalayaan, partly on the basis of this exploration, arguing that the islands: 1) were not part of the Spratly Islands; and 2) had not belonged to anyone and were open to being claimed. In 1972, they were designated as part of Palawan Province, and have been occupied.</p>
Taiwan	<p>Taiwan's claims are similar to those of China, and are based upon the same principles. As with China, Taiwan's claims are also not clearly defined. Occupies Pratas Island in the Spratlys.</p>

Vietnam	<p>Vietnamese claims are based on history and the continental shelf principle. Vietnam claims the entire Spratly Islands (Truong Sa in Vietnamese) as an offshore district of the province of Khanh Hoa. Vietnamese claims also cover an extensive area of the South China Sea, although they are not clearly defined. In addition, Vietnam claims the Paracel Islands (the Hoang Sa in Vietnamese), although they were seized by the Chinese in 1974.</p> <p>The Vietnamese have followed the Chinese example of using archaeological evidence to bolster sovereignty claims. In the 1930's, France claimed the Spratly and Paracel Islands on behalf of its then-colony Vietnam. Vietnam has since occupied 20 of the Spratly Islands to enforce its claims.</p>
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TABLE 1 TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN THE SPRATLY AND PARACEL ISLANDS

All nations with territorial claims on the Spratlys except Brunei have attempted to strengthen and justify their claims to the Islands by establishing a military presence and/or occupying and building structures on one or more of the Islands.<sup>11</sup> Numerous military clashes in the South China Sea have taken place over the past 20 years as a result of nations claiming and attempting to enforce territorial sovereignty over parts of the Spratlys. These military clashes have taken place as nations attempted occupation and settlement on the islands and also involved harassment of nations attempting settlement and occupation with China being involved in a significant amount of the clashes. A summary of the military clashes is shown in table 2.

Date	Countries	Military Action
1974	China, Vietnam	Chinese seized the Paracel Islands from Vietnam, with 18 of its troops killed in clashes on one of the islands.
1988	China, Vietnam	Chinese and Vietnamese navies clashed at Johnson Reef in the Spratly Islands. Several Vietnamese boats were sunk and over 70 sailors killed.
1992	China, Vietnam	Vietnam accused China of landing troops on Da Luc Reef. China seized almost 20 Vietnamese cargo ships transporting goods from Hong Kong from June - September.
1994	China, Vietnam	China and Vietnam had naval confrontations within Vietnam's internationally recognized territorial waters over Vietnam's Tu Chinh oil exploration blocks 133, 134, and 135. Chinese claim the area as part of their Wan' Bei-21 (WAB-21) block.
1995	China, Philippines	China occupied Philippine-claimed Mischief Reef. Philippine military evicted the Chinese in March and destroyed Chinese markers.

1995	Taiwan, Vietnam	Taiwanese artillery fired on a Vietnamese supply ship.
1996	China, Philippines	In January, Chinese vessels engaged in a 90-minute gun battle with a Philippine navy gunboat near Capones Island.
1997	China, Philippines	The Philippine navy ordered a Chinese speedboat and two fishing boats to leave Scarborough Shoal in April; the Philippine navy later removed Chinese markers and raised its flag. China sent three warships to survey Philippine-occupied Panata and Kota Islands
1998	Philippines, Vietnam	In January, Vietnamese soldiers fired on a Philippine fishing boat near Tenement (Pigeon) Reef.
1999	China, Philippines	In May, a Chinese fishing boat was sunk in a collision with Philippine warship. In July, another Chinese fishing boat was sunk in a collision with a Philippine warship.
1999	China, Philippines	In May, Chinese warships were accused of harassing a Philippine navy vessel after it ran aground near the Spratly Islands.
1999	Philippines, Vietnam	In October, Vietnamese troops fired upon a Philippine air force plane on reconnaissance in the Spratly Islands.
1999	Malaysia, Philippines	In October, Philippine defense sources reported that 2 Malaysian fighter planes and 2 Philippine air force surveillance planes nearly engaged over a Malaysian-occupied reef in the Spratly Islands. The Malaysian Defense Ministry stated that it was not a stand-off.

TABLE 2 MILITARY CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES

Territorial claims on the Spratlys use various justifications. "Most of the claims are historical but they are also based upon internationally accepted principles extending territorial claims offshore onto a country's continental shelf, as well as based on the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately the differences over these justifications and the inability to diplomatically solve the territorial issues have led to the continuing military disputes amongst member nations over the legitimacy of their claims.

The United Nations Law of the Sea Convention defines the concept of an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which is an area up to 200 nautical miles beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea. This EEZ gives coastal nations "sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the

waters adjacent to" (above) "the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil..."<sup>13</sup> This EEZ concept creates the potential for overlapping territorial claims in areas such as the South China Sea. As previously stated nations have clashed militarily as they attempt to occupy or establish settlements on the Spratlys to justify their claims to the territory.

## ATTEMPTS AT RESOLUTION

Attempts to arbitrate the territorial disputes have met with limited success. Indonesia (which does not have a territorial claim) as a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has taken the initiative to try and resolve the South China Sea issues through ASEAN. ASEAN members include all South China Sea members except China and Taiwan. ASEAN has worked previously with China and Taiwan on less contentious issues which have laid a foundation for possible resolution through ASEAN of more difficult issues such as the Spratly Islands.

In 1996 ASEAN put forth the idea of a "code of conduct" for the Spratly Island region to allow for scientific research, and efforts to combat piracy and drug trafficking. The code of conduct did not discuss the sovereignty issue regarding the Spratlys.<sup>14</sup> To date progress with China towards developing the ASEAN proposed code of conduct has been slow. The territorial issues have also been discussed in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) consisting of 22 total nations including ASEAN members plus others outside the immediate region (including the U.S) which have an interest in maintaining regional peace and stability. Unfortunately these attempts have done little to actually solve the territorial disputes. While they have fostered discussions on the issue little in the way of concrete results have come about.<sup>15</sup>

China's overall view with respect to solving the territorial disputes has remained focused on bilateral solutions between China and the specific nation involved rather than through multilateral or international forum.<sup>16</sup> China, which has the greatest territorial claim and has pressed the issue of sovereignty with numerous military clashes to back up its claim of ownership, is clearly a key to achieving a peaceful resolution.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

The estimates of potential oil and natural gas resources in the Spratly Island area of the South China Sea vary. Chinese estimates for both oil and natural gas are considered the most optimistic with one estimate suggesting the Spratlys could become similar to the Persian Gulf region for oil production. Most other analysts do not share the Chinese optimism on the amount of resources to be found with the most optimistic western estimate putting the oil production capability on the same scale as current production in Brunei or Vietnam. Estimates on natural

gas are similar to that for oil with the Chinese estimates being significantly higher than those by non Chinese estimates.<sup>17</sup>

#### STRATEGIC SEA LINE OF COMMUNICATION.

Approximately half of the world's maritime shipping passes through the South China Sea. The Straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok are key chokepoints which funnel maritime traffic in/out of the South China Sea region from the Middle East and Northeast Asia. This volume of shipping through the South China Sea makes it a region of global significance. Any disruption to shipping through these water would not only affect the nearby Asian nations but those throughout the world. Imports and exports of natural resources and manufactured goods would be affected and economies would suffer as a result of higher shipping charges, increased distances needed for transport and shortages resulting from shipping disruptions.<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. position regarding nations quarreling over the Spratlys was summed up well in a warning by Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1995. " 'The United States does not take sides in this dispute, but will not accept the disruption of trade passing through the South China Sea.' The American position is based on direct national economic interest, as well as quasi-altruistic interests to protect in the region, as SLOC blockage could immediately and directly disrupt the U.S. economy. The United States also needs to protect its trade links to healthy, prosperous trading partners to maintain its own prosperity."<sup>19</sup>

#### CHINA AS THE SOUTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL HEGEMON

While the Bush administration's National Security Strategy and Defense Planning Guidance is yet to be published, it has maintained the long standing policy of forward presence with U.S. forces in Asia and the Pacific in accordance with treaties and bilateral agreements to maintain peace and security in the region. The U.S. is considered a key ally by nations such as Japan, Korea, Singapore and The Philippines. Additionally, the U.S. is sometimes referred to as an "honest broker" or "balancer" by some of the region's nations when it comes to mediating or solving disputes between nations.<sup>20</sup> Of prime concern to the U.S. is working towards solutions that contribute to further peace and stability in the region. However, to China which is continuing to grow and become more influential throughout the South China Sea region, the presence of U.S. forces in the region poses unnecessary and unwanted outside influence.

China sees itself as the natural leader in Asia. It is not in the interests of the U.S. or other nations of the region to see China become the dominant player and regional hegemon. China is building and acquiring modern military equipment that will eventually enable it to prevail militarily

against nations in the South China Sea region if not dissuaded or deterred by the presence of U.S. forces.<sup>21</sup>

As noted previously China claims the Spratly Islands in their entirety and has attempted to establish military outposts on some of the islands to justify their territorial claims. In view of China's stated claims on the islands and its ever increasing need for natural resources, any solution to the territorial dispute may have to give significant validity to China's claims in order for China to agree with it. Disputes during the last 10 years over drilling and exploration in the South China Sea are detailed in table 3.

Date	Countries	Disputes
1992	China, Vietnam	In May, China signed a contract with U.S. firm Crestone to explore for oil near the Spratly Islands in an area that Vietnam says is located on its continental shelf, over 600 miles south of China's Hainan Island. In September, Vietnam accused China of drilling for oil in Vietnamese waters in the Gulf of Tonkin.
1993	China, Vietnam	In May, Vietnam accused a Chinese seismic survey ship of interfering with British Petroleum's exploration work in Vietnamese waters. The Chinese ship left Vietnamese block 06 following the appearance of 2 Vietnamese naval ships.
1993	China, Vietnam	In December, Vietnam demanded that Crestone cancel offshore oil development in nearby waters.
1994	China, Vietnam	Crestone joined with a Chinese partner to explore China's Wan' Bei-21 (WAB-21) block. Vietnam protested that the exploration was in Vietnamese waters in their blocks 133, 134, and 135. China offered to split Wan' Bei production with Vietnam, as long as China retained all sovereignty.
1994	China, Vietnam	In August, Vietnamese gunboats forced a Chinese exploration ship to leave an oilfield in a region claimed by the Vietnamese.
1996	China, Vietnam	In April, Vietnam leased exploration blocks to U.S. firm Conoco, and ruled out cooperation with U.S. oil firms that signed Chinese exploration contracts in disputed waters. Vietnamese blocks 133 and 134 cover half the zone leased to Crestone by China. China protested, and reaffirmed a national law claiming the South China Sea as its own in May.

1997	China, Vietnam	In March, Vietnamese issued a protest after the Chinese Kantan-3 oil rig drills near Spratly Islands in March. The drilling occurred offshore Da Nang, in an area Vietnam calls Block 113. The block is located 64 nautical miles off Chan May cape in Vietnam, and 71 nautical miles off China's Hainan Island. The diplomatic protests were followed by the departure of the Chinese rig.
1997	China, Vietnam	In December, Vietnamese protested after the Exploration Ship No. 8 and two supply ships entered the Wan' Bei exploration block. All 3 vessels were escorted away by the Vietnamese navy.
1998	China, Vietnam	In September, Vietnamese protested after a Chinese report stated that Crestone and China were continuing their survey of the Spratly Islands and the Tu Chinh region (Wan' Bei in Chinese).

TABLE 3 DISPUTES OVER DRILLING AND EXPLORATION IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

Attempts to resolve the territorial disputes to date have been unsuccessful and while ASEAN and the ARF continue to try and resolve the issues I do not see any near to mid term solutions readily available. As this region is of strategic importance for the U.S. and its allies the U.S. must continue to be in position to contribute to its peace and stability.

The Chinese have a long memory regarding the ability of a nation well outside the region being able to coerce, influence or militarily defeat it via maritime power primarily. The Opium War between the British and Chinese took place from 1839-1842 and showcased the British Navy's ability to force the Chinese to comply with a British position.<sup>22</sup> The inability of the Chinese to respond to the British Navy's use of maritime forces offers a lesson. As China today builds up its military forces it is doing it with an eye to countering the U.S. Navy and other regional navies' presence in the South China Sea. This development of Chinese naval power will lead to a navy with regional power projection capabilities as is increasingly evident as they purchase additional warships, amphibious transports and air and ground launched cruise missiles for use against ships at sea.

One can make an argument that it is not in China's best interest to claim the potential oil and natural gas resources of the Spratlys and their surrounding waters by military force. However, the U.S. must be postured with the capability to dissuade, deter and defeat if necessary any seizure by force. Upsetting the regional balance of power by a seizure of the Spratlys does not now seem to be in China's interest but her long term natural resource and energy needs are a growing concern. Additionally, any disruption of the shipping lanes in the South China Sea is clearly not in China's interest as it would severely effect her economy which relies heavily on such shipping. However, China has long espoused her territorial claims over

the Spratlys which are somewhat similar to claims she makes on Taiwan. It can not be overlooked that China has repeatedly made small scale military incursions into the area to reaffirm her sovereignty claims. Failure of the U.S. to be able to dissuade or deter potential Chinese aggression would lead to a power vacuum in the region with the Chinese being the nation most likely to fill the vacuum.

It is difficult to predict China's long term intentions with respect to the Spratly Islands. China has demonstrated a desire to seize all the islands over the previous 25 years but has been unsuccessful due to the limited means available and employed. While efforts continue for a peaceful negotiated settlement of the sovereignty issues China has a definite growing need for energy sources that are proposed to be found in and around the Spratlys. Additionally, as China envisions itself the dominant player in Southeast Asia, it will not be satisfied until the Spratlys ultimately are accepted and recognized as Chinese territory.

Time is on the side of China. It is continuing to enlarge its military furthering its ability to dominate, threaten and coerce its neighbors in the region. As Chinese maritime power becomes stronger, its nationalistic ideology combined with a desire to be the dominant regional power may lead to favorably resolving - by force if necessary – its territorial claims which are currently in dispute.<sup>23</sup> It is increasing its naval capabilities by procuring additional ships, aircraft and anti-ship cruise missile capability. China is not building a blue water navy that will rival the U.S. Navy throughout the world, but it will have a significant capability to project naval power in the South China Sea and surrounding areas. This increase in naval capability will help China assert its naval influence and strategic ambitions throughout the region.<sup>24</sup> As time passes and the situation on the Korean peninsula eventually resolves itself, the need for U.S. troops and aircraft permanently stationed on Asian soil may decrease. There is already significant public sentiment in Japan and Korea for the removal of U.S. forces stationed on their soil. Naval forces operating in international waters in the Asia Pacific region will remain the prominent means of visibly reinforcing the US goal of regional stability and a credible deterrent to any nation's non peaceful aspirations.

Military clashes in the South China Sea over the Spratly Islands were previously shown in table 2. The potential for future clashes continues as China and the other nations with territorial claims disagree over sovereignty. The potential for a minor clash to escalate and turn into a regional crisis exists and must be taken into account by the U.S. The 2001 QDR has increased the U.S. military's emphasis on maintaining a favorable military balance and capability in the Asia/Pacific region. In time this emphasis should lead to increased forward deterrence capability allowing for the continued ability to assure friends and allies and dissuade, deter or

defeat if necessary any Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. Military forces acting together with other instruments of U.S. power have the potential to influence the actions of other nations in U.S. interests.<sup>25</sup>

### **U.S. MILITARY FORWARD PRESENCE**

While all services contribute to deterrence and crisis response they have different capabilities. Some services are more suited than others depending on the political considerations and the location where they might be called on to provide deterrence or crisis response. Ground forces provide a strong signal of American commitment and play a predominant and very visible role in Korea. They are also still stationed in Europe and played the same deterrence role during the Cold war.

Department of Defense through the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review has made several decisions which task the military departments with increasing capabilities in the Asia/Pacific region. For example the Navy has been tasked to increase Carrier Battle Group presence and explore options for home-porting three to four additional surface combatants in the Western Pacific area, and the Air Force has been tasked to increase contingency basing options in the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas.<sup>26</sup>

The Asia/Pacific region by means of its vast ocean expanse has long been considered a maritime region that lends itself well to the use of U.S. Naval forces for forward presence and crisis response. The "Tyranny of Distance" is often used by persons familiar with the area to describe it in terms of its size and the problems it poses for military planners and operators. With the exception of the Korean peninsula the other flashpoints and potential areas of conflict are in the littoral regions or international waters. Inserting or maintaining a credible U.S. ground presence or establishing additional basing for aircraft in the region could be difficult politically not to mention the problems of introducing the infrastructure to support establishment of such a base.

In order for military forces to be effective in their overseas presence role foreign nations need to be aware of the forces and their capability. "The purpose of U.S. Naval forces remains to project the power and influence of the nation across the seas to foreign waters and shores both in peace and war."<sup>27</sup> Keeping forces forward deployed on a routine basis as opposed to only responding to crisis is as Edward Rhodes observes, "a strategy of communicating commitment through routine presence may be less likely to...stress an adversary unnecessarily and increase the risk of irrational escalation."<sup>28</sup> The self-sustainability of naval forces make them a good force for the presence mission due to their long term ability to maintain combat

credible forces at sea without the need for land bases and host nation support. Finally, the flexibility inherent in naval forces gives the President and his policy makers a wide variety of options when dealing with an emerging crisis or threat. Full scale sustained strike operations using carrier air power and surface and subsurface launched cruise missiles, mining ports and denying access through naval blockades, maritime interdiction operations to enforce sanctions, and, using the stealth capability inherent in submarines to obtain intelligence information all are available immediately from on scene forward deployed naval forces.<sup>29</sup>

With the premise of China as a potential regional hegemon in Southeast Asia and using the South China Sea and Spratly Islands as a potential flashpoint, how do forward deployed U.S. Navy forces contribute to maintaining peace and stability in the region and are there other options? The military's primary mission is to deter and if necessary fight and win our nation's wars. Forward naval presence is the cornerstone of U.S. naval strategy. Combat credible U.S. Navy forces forward deployed in the Asia/Pacific region whether home-ported in Japan, or in theater on a rotational basis from bases in the continental United States, Hawaii and Guam influence events and can deter potential conflict by virtue of their mere presence. Unmatched sustainability, flexibility and assured access make the Navy well suited for providing deterrence through presence. This presence in maintaining regional stability is a way in which military means support our desired national ends.

As part of the U.S. and Japan's Mutual Defense Treaty significant U.S. forces are permanently based in Japan. Navy forces including the Commander SEVENTH Fleet, a Carrier Battle Group and an Amphibious Readiness Group are permanently forward deployed in the Asia/Pacific Region and home-ported in Japan. The U.S. Marine Corps has a Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) forward deployed and permanently based in Okinawa comprising significant ground, and air combat capability. United States Air Force and United States Army forces are also forward deployed and stationed on Japanese soil. In the Republic of Korea (ROK) the United States Army and Air Force have permanently stationed significant ground and air combat forces including the Eighth U.S. Army and Seventh Air Force as part of our commitment to the security and defense of South Korea. Navy and Marine forces forward deployed in the Asia/Pacific region are also readily available if needed in the event of rising tensions or conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Additional U.S. military forces which are home-based in CONUS rotate through the Asia/Pacific region on a routine basis or can be deployed forward in time of crisis.

The U.S. military also fosters programs that lead to dialogue between military members from countries of the region. The Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies sponsored by

Commander in Chief Pacific Command has the following charter: "Enhance cooperation and build relationships through mutual understanding and study of comprehensive security issues and build relationships among civilian and military representatives of the U.S. and Asia-Pacific nations." Another organization which encourages dialogue for senior level officers or national equivalents in the Asia-Pacific region is the Pacific Armies Management Seminar sponsored by the U.S. Army Pacific. Both these organizations seek to promote and foster better understandings of the dynamic and complex issues that affect all nations throughout the region. This is a good example of military engagement to collectively contribute towards the goal of regional stability.

U.S. Navy presence throughout the waters of the Asia/Pacific region has been maintained since the end of World War II and shows all nations in the region our commitment to fostering not only our own national interests and treaty obligations, but, overall regional stability and security. Additionally, the ability to have credible forces readily available to respond rapidly to crisis shows U.S. resolve and determination to influence events. The rapid military response by the U.S. to the increased tensions in 1996 between China and Taiwan by positioning two Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups in the Taiwan Straits was a clear demonstration of how forward deployed Navy forces worked as a military element of national power in conjunction with diplomatic and economic means in support of U.S. and regional interests to de-escalate a potential conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Continuous presence and engagement in the Asia/Pacific region is also demonstrated by the U.S. Navy in a variety of ways other than responding to crisis. Bilateral and multilateral exercises with other nation's navies, participating in regional conferences dealing with security, naval and other defense related issues, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, and port calls by navy ships throughout the Asia/Pacific region all contribute to concrete evidence of U.S. presence with credible forces in the area.

Navy forces have long participated in exercises with the naval forces of other nations. The ability to participate in such exercises in international waters out of sight of land and the civilian population may ease the political issues and sensitivities some nations have in participating with one another such as Japan and South Korea. Both nations have recently participated with the U.S. Navy and the Republic of Singapore in Pacific Reach 2000, an exercise that simulated rescuing crewmembers from disabled submarines.<sup>31</sup> Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) is a biennial large scale naval power projection/sea control exercise sponsored by the United States Pacific Fleet. In 2000 it brought together navy forces from U.S., Canada, Japan, Australia, South Korea, Chile and the UK. Exercises such as these foster improved

working relationships between militaries and their leaders and can lead to increased cooperation and understanding between nations further increasing regional peace and stability.

Port calls by U.S. Navy ships in locations such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Manila, Jakarta, Singapore and other locations throughout the Asia/Pacific region further demonstrates U.S. commitment and capability in the region along with bringing economic benefits to the host nation. The U.S. Navy makes approximately 700 such port visits a year throughout the Pacific region.

“China is almost certain to become a superpower this century and could emerge as a threat to the United States...I don’t think China has to be a threat, but I think if we’re complacent, then we could actually contribute to the opposite effect.”<sup>32</sup> The previous quote was from Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz in the fall of 2001.

#### ALTERNATIVES FOR MAINTAINING U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN THE ASIA/PACIFIC REGION

I see the following as potential options the U.S. Navy has with respect to having forward deployed forces in the Asia/Pacific region in order to guard against complacency with respect to the ambitions of China in the South China Sea region using the Spratly Islands as a potential flashpoint for regional aggression.

1. Maintain the status quo. Keep the current level of forces forward deployed and permanently home-ported in Japan while continuing to augment those forces with additional Navy forces rotating through the region on a routine basis.
2. Increase Navy presence in the region by increasing both the number of forces permanently home-ported in Japan and rotated through the region from CONUS. Additionally, forward deploy and permanently homeport additional forces in Japan and/or other countries in the region such as Singapore and U.S. territories nearby such as Guam.
3. Reduce/remove U.S. Navy forces forward deployed and permanently home-ported in the region and maintain a US Navy presence in the region with forces on routine deployment rotated from the continental U.S., Hawaii and Guam.

#### ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES.

I see a hybrid of alternatives 1 and 2 as the best way the U.S. Navy can continue to support our National Security Strategy by contributing to maintaining peace and stability throughout the South China Sea and Spratly Islands. Clearly any move towards disengagement and/or reduction of U.S. Navy forces in the region would be viewed as the U.S. pulling back on our commitments and in sharp contrast to the current administration’s policy to increase

emphasis in the region. Many nations in the region look on the U.S. as an “honest broker” with the Navy providing a visible presence of our on-scene commitment and ability to influence events— by force if necessary. A pullout or reduction in forces would leave a power vacuum and the potential for regional instability to fill this vacuum would clearly not be in the best interests of the U.S. or our friends and allies in the region.

Current sentiment in Japan is to look for less U.S. military presence rather than more. Maintaining the current level of U.S. Navy home-ported in Japan is adequate. The U.S. has already stated its intentions to reduce the size of the footprint made by USMC forces on Okinawa.<sup>33</sup> Pushing the Japanese government to allow for increased number of U.S. Navy ships home-ported in Japan is not worth the potential downside of stirring up the people and government to further downsize all U.S. forces stationed in Japan. While Navy forces home-ported in Japan require a base for support similar to land and air forces, their use may be politically more palatable to a host nation since they conduct operating relatively “out of sight” of the host nation connection while operating in international waters in the region. Additionally, they are free to operate unencumbered by permissions needed from a host nation government in times of conflict unlike land and air forces deployed in a foreign country.

Exploring options to home-port U.S. Navy ships (other than those already home-ported in Japan) in other countries and territories in the Asia/Pacific region is receiving additional attention in DOD through the recently released 2001 QDR. Specifically the QDR tasks the Navy to increase its presence in the Asia/Pacific region. Navy is already planning on stationing three submarines in Guam and is looking at other nations in the region which may welcome a U.S. Navy presence. Singapore is one nation which has been a friend for the U.S. Navy and permanently hosts a SEVENTH Fleet shore based logistic command. Singapore has also spent considerable money building a large pier to accommodate U.S. Navy aircraft carriers. This cooperation from the government of Singapore is most welcome as would be any future assistance.

Guam is a viable option for forward basing navy forces. U.S. Naval Station, Guam was established in 1899 the same year in which Guam became a U.S. territory. Being a U.S. territory provides significant advantages when it comes to stationing forces in Guam. Chief among them are that those basing rights are not subject to a renewable treaty with a foreign government. In the early 1990s the U.S. removed its forward based forces from Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines due to an inability to reach a new agreement for basing rights with the then Philippine government. The consequences of this “pull out” from the Philippines without a corresponding increase elsewhere in the region not only led to a loss

of military capability in the region but a perception by Asia/Pacific nations that the U.S. was pulling back on its regional commitments.

Navy forces have long valued the strategic position of Guam which provides for quick access and reach into the Asia/Pacific region. Today Guam is home to numerous Navy commands supporting Navy operations of the SEVENTH and FIFTH Fleets throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and Persian Gulf region. Possessing a sheltered deep water harbor, in-place infrastructure and nearby Anderson Air Force Base readily available for logistics support, Guam provides good options for forward basing some additional U.S. Naval forces. While the naval facility is not capable of handling a carrier battle group size force or of providing the same support as was previously available at the Subic Bay Naval facility in the Philippines, forward stationing some additional U.S. Naval assets in Guam will send a strong signal to allies, friendly, and potentially non-friendly nations, of the U.S. intent to stay engaged with its maritime forces throughout the Western Pacific and Asia Pacific regions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout the twenty-first century the United States will continue to have vital interests at stake in the Asia/Pacific region. With over half the world's maritime trade passing through the region, ensuring regional stability and security, and, preventing the rise of a belligerent regional hegemon are clearly in the U.S. national interest. China through its actions and statements is clearly positioning itself to be the dominant regional player for the next century. The U.S. must engage with China and other nations in the region to facilitate peaceful solutions to issues that affect one or more of the nations and have the potential to cause tensions that could lead to military escalation and eventual conflict.

While the U.S. must remain engaged diplomatically, economically and through information technology, its ability to provide a credible military deterrent should diplomacy, economic or other non-military means fail, is critical to maintaining its being seen as the "honest broker," with the means to back it up, with respect to maintaining regional stability throughout the Asia Pacific region.

Currently the U.S. has a variety of ground, air and naval forces stationed throughout the region. Our sizable ground and air footprint on the Korean peninsula is the result of the armistice resulting from the Korean War. These forces stationed on the peninsula are strictly for the defense of Korea. Eventually the Korean peninsula will be reunited militarily or diplomatically and the need for those U.S. ground troops and air forces will be a topic up for debate. Air, naval and ground forces based in Japan provide for Japanese defense. After W W

II and the end of the occupation of Japan, the U.S. entered into a mutual defense treaty with the Japanese to secure its defense. This permitted the forward basing of U.S. forces in Japan. The post war Japanese constitution only allowed for Japan to have self-defense forces and these are not permitted to be deployed outside Japan. Some nations in the region including China still harbor resentment towards Japan for its aggressive conduct during WW II, and without the U.S. mutual defense commitment could become belligerent towards Japan. While the U.S. forces based in Japan provide a strong show of U.S. commitment towards Japanese security against any aggressor they also deploy throughout the region contributing to overall regional peace and stability, particularly the naval forces home-ported in Japan.

Maintaining U.S. overseas presence and basing is important to demonstrate our commitment to the region. In the early 1990s as U.S. ties with the Philippines deteriorated the leases for the massive U.S naval and air bases in that country were not renewed by the Philippine government. Despite the loss of the bases the U.S remained engaged in the region. However, many countries saw this as a significant U.S. reduction in forces and de-emphasis in the importance of the area from the U.S. perspective. It is in not only the U.S.'s best interests but those of the nations in the region as well to continue to nurture the U.S. - Japan relationship to avoid a repeat of the Philippine experience.

While hard to imagine a significant downgrade in the number of U.S. forces in Japan, it is possible to think of a lessening of their presence as a vocal minority of Japanese continue to push for the removal of U.S. forces stationed in Japan. Naval forces based in Japan are subject to the same sentiment for removal as are other U.S. forces. However, for reasons previously described in this paper they offer the least aggravating footprint and contribute significantly not only to Japanese security but to regional security as well. Visible and with significant combat capability naval forces offer a unique display of U.S. commitment, presence and deterrent capability in a region dominated by the potential for conflict to start in a maritime environment. Always on station they offer the most indispensable component of U.S. commitment to forward presence throughout the Asia/Pacific maritime region.

WORD COUNT = 7839



## ENDNOTES

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